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Revisiting the Universality of Multiple Intelligences Theory in English Writing Classroom: Putting Theory Into Practice

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Abstract

The present study was undertaken based on an assumption that there is no full guarantee that the university-level students from English department could be easily successful in writing activities. This might be as a result of differences in individuals' characteristics contributing to language learning process, and even better it has something to do with the so-called "Intelligence". While some relevant studies concerned about the relationship between the students' Multiple Intelligence profile and their ability in language learning, the current findings contradicted the findings that of researches. In relation with writing skill, some show a significant correlation, some found only partial correlation, and some illustrated insignificant correlation between the observed variables. To have a clearer picture as to this arguable issue, the present study's aim was about to look into the relationship between multiple intelligences as a whole part and linguistic intelligence as a part of multiple intelligences, and writing performance of English department students in a state university. This study employed mix method and the instruments applied were MI Inventory, a writing scale adopted from IELTS writing task 2, and interview. A small number of students, 27 students, actively participated in this study, and the findings indicated that insignificant correlation existed between students' writing performance and their MI profile as a whole part or as independent intelligence, namely linguistic intelligence.

Keywords: Multiple Intelligences, Writing Performance, Writing Ability, EFL Learners.

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1. Introduction

Needless to say, writing, one of productive skills, plays a pivotal factor in communication in any language. To communicate, not only are people able to express their ideas orally but they also are capable of expressing the ideas in written form. For this reason, it can be said that one can openly air what they feel in a sentence form if only they find difficulties to utter the sentence.

This, however, is a complex and complicated task to students who learn English as Second Language (ESL) or English as Foreign Language (EFL) as Heaton (1989) briefly delineated that sometimes writing is somewhat difficult to teach due to the complexity of written language. In addition, Westwood (2008) also boldly proclaimed that why written

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language is believed to be by far the most challenging skill amongst all language skills is because of its development involving many laborious coordinations, including cognitive, linguistic, and psycho-motor processes. It is no wonder that the students only partially comprehend, even barely understand, the given writing materials which the teachers attempt to clarify in the classroom. Thus, it is evident that a teacher be creative in selecting, sequencing, and delivering writing material to the students effectively and efficiently, and is imperative that the writing material be highly likely to be more comprehensible, attuned, and students-oriented.

Aside from the aforementioned point, while sorting out the teaching material, the teachers should seriously ponder one of major issues contributing in the classroom instruction, the so-called individual differences. In consideration of the individual difference's utmost importance, it is inevitable that it contributes to a more successful instruction in the classroom. To this end, a theory called Multiple Intelligences (MIs) emerged in 1983 by Howard Gardner to accommodate this focus of attention. It is commonly regarded that the uniqueness of many an individual creates a significant distinction pertaining to the way of learning process. To the point, Gardner (2003) asserted that it is undoubtedly true that each individual possesses particular intelligence to success in many forms, nevertheless, the extent to which that certain intelligence dominant and instrumental in that of individual appears entirely dissimilar to one another. All in all, in respect of individual differences in classroom instruction, a more in-depth understanding towards students' different intelligence account should be distinguished to begin with, so an effective instruction in any class can be likely to be provided. It means that an effective instruction can be possibly provided if only the designed teaching materials could cater students' different needs in learning; though, it is quite challenging to cover all of those different needs in one-meeting course. Thus, it is highly suggested that the designed teaching materials that meet the students' needs are equally addressed per meeting.

Unfortunately, in Indonesian context, it is still too common to find out that English teachers or lecturers still have confidence in conventional way of teaching; even some up-to-date teaching approaches are available in this area of interest. This is basically because of some particular reasons that put the English teachers or lecturers in that situation. As such, the exposure of linguistic intelligence is reasonably high, resulting in dominant development in one's linguistic intelligence, and it, of course, does not facilitate any other intelligence, which is dominant to other students. For instance, when the lecturers promote a writing activity that involves note-taking only, some students, who prefer learning through visual outlines, will somewhat struggle in generating ideas. As a result, those who are not mainly good in linguistic domain but any other intelligence may find it difficult to follow particular classes. In fact, many a student in Indonesia who is assumed to be good at linguistic abilities still struggles with the material due to the fact that learning foreign language involves so many processes. Hence, it does not merely true that language learning should completely emphasis one's linguistic capabilities by providing such an immerse exposure of it, yet a serious consideration for one's multiple intelligence profile in learning a language should come first and this should be carefully taken into account.

In point of fact, a number of research associated with MI-based instruction in second/foreign language teaching have been in practice throughout years as a result of a dramatically growing interest in MI. The focus of research, furthermore, is mainly on its application and relationship to the educational settings across the world. On the one hand, rarely is it concerned more for English writing skill in Indonesian context. This limited

number of study drives a strong desire of the researcher to carry out a related study. Accordingly, Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory is under the impression that it can be easily explained and applied to a group of participants; even they are categorized as young learners (Armstrong, 2009). Its great tendency towards students' development in achieving learning objectives is clearly justified. Implementing what seems to be the utmost intelligence which the students possess in teaching material, the teacher may design the needed teaching material that the students will be able to adequately demonstrate in the end of learning activity.

That is why Multiple Intelligences theory is more likely to be taken into account in determining the designed teaching material inasmuch as this will lead the students directly to the problem-solving.

To verify the given statement, the current study is intended to see the probable correlation between multiple intelligences and writing performance of university-level students, majoring in English department. For this to happen, the following research questions are generated:

RQ1: Does the universality of the correlation between Multiple Intelligence and students' writing performance in English essay writing classroom exist?

RQ2: Does linguistic intelligence significantly relate to the students' success in English essay writing?

2. Objectives of The Study

This study is to attempt to put theory into practice, and the main objectives of the research based on the generated research questions are: 1) to ascertain whether or not Multiple Intelligences and students' writing performance in English essay writing is significantly correlated, and 2) to discover whether or not linguistic intelligence has a significant relationship to the students' success in English essay writing.

3. Research Method

The design of this research was a mixed method design, involving a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches as there will be a description of the profile of multiple intelligences possessed by the students as well as the profile of their writing performance. The specific design of this current study was a sequential explanatory design

3.1. Participants

The present studies employed purposive sampling, thus. 27 students (one writing class) were selected to contribute in the study. The researcher purposely chose one class of the students because of a specific issue that those students participating in this study came from 2 different classes with the same lecturer in charge in teaching each level of writing courses per semester. This might result in the same level of acquired writing input during four-semester study. Therefore, under an inevitable assumption that none of particular gap in what the students got in each level of writing course, it might give positive effect to students' writing performance

3.2 Instruments

In this study, two instruments were employed, all of which are, MI Inventory and writing test. The multiple intelligence inventory adopted from Armstrong (2009) was to survey and to identify the students' multiple intelligence (MI) profile. 10 unnecessary

statements which belong to existential intelligence were unused since it is out of the scope of the study. The adopted MI Inventory contained 80 statements which were randomly organized, addressing to eight types of intelligence, including spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and natural intelligences.

Another instrument employed in the study was writing test which adopted an IELTS writing exam. Also, the applied writing scale came from IELTS writing band descriptor, so the students' score were obtained from the so-called IELTS writing band descriptor. The result of the students' writing will be correlated with their personal MI profile. Additionally, some selected subject would be interviewed according to the students' writing classification to affirm the students' perspective towards their previous writing classes and MI theory

3.3 Procedures

The study was conducted when the students had enrolled in their last writing course in the academic year, and it was academic writing course. The MI questionnaire was administered first before the students had the writing test.

3.4 Data Analysis

When the data had been completely collected, the researcher then analysed the correlation between observed variables with Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer the research question 1 and research question 2.

4. Result And Discussion

As it is vividly noticeable in Table 1, both MI as a whole part and linguistic intelligence show a very weak correlation with students' writing score, even worse MI as a whole has a negative correlation with the observed variable. *Moreover, the significance values of both variables are greater than 0.05, indicating that no correlation exists between the observed variables.*

Table 1. Correlation Coefficient of MIs as a whole part and as an individual intelligence, namely linguistic intelligence with students' writing performance

		Ling Int.	MI
Students Writing	Pearson Correlation	.043	-.176
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.833	.380
	N	27	27

Based on the finding, for the research question 1 and 2, it can be concluded that insignificant correlation between the observed variables exists.

The findings of the current study are in conjunction with some studies. The findings of Razmjoo (2008), for instance, revealed that insignificant correlation between language proficiency and the intelligences as a whole and the types of intelligences was found out amongst hundreds of male and female Iranian students taking part in Ph. D degree. Similarly, a 2009 study conducted by Saricaoglu and Arikan reported the same finding that no significant correlation laid between the observed variables and foreign language success.

In association with the findings of the current study, Saedi et al (2014) also investigated the relationship between MI and students' writing performance. Their findings

also revealed that insignificant correlation existed between overall MI and male intermediate learners' writing performance. Moreover, Bagheri and Ghasemi (2013) also undertook a related study amongst 30 advanced IELTS learners and the finding was somewhat shocking. The fact that no correlation between Emotional Intelligence and participants' writing score existed was justified. Other similar results were obtained by Rad et al (2014); Esmaeili (2014); Hanafiyeh (2013); Sadeghi and Farizadeh (2012) which reported the insignificant relationship between MIs and English proficiency.

On the one hand, in contrast with the current study's findings, some relevant studies showed any significant relationship between MI and writing or language learning context. Take the study from Ahmadian & Hosseini (2011) for example, the study was aimed to explore the correlation between L2 Learners' MI and the participants' writing performance, and the result of the study showed a statistically significant correlation between the observed variables. At the same time, Marefat (2007), who also investigated the underlying correlation between students' MI profile and their writing performance, claimed that the correlation did exist. She utilized McKenzie's (1999) MI Inventory as the instrument to answer the generated research question in her study.

Apart from those various findings, one crucial thing that strikes the researcher the most is that the linguistic intelligence as a part of MI has no relationship with the students' writing performance as the reflection of the finding of the current study. On the contrary, on the basis of MI Theory, it is strongly believed that linguistic intelligence has something to do with the application of language itself, either written or spoken language (Gardner, 1993 and Armstrong, 2009)). At the same line, Said (2015) added that this intelligence covers one's competence in reading, writing, discussing, and arguing. An empirical study from Larsen-Freeman (2001) also came with a conclusion that linguistic intelligence is closely related to writing ability. Assuming that the given issue will lead us to a strong correlation between linguistic intelligence and students' writing performance, the researcher failed to prove this relationship. The researcher, then, develops a personal assumption that the overall score of students' writing performance may affect the correlation of the observed variables, whilst it was not the intention of the study to see the other factors that may contribute to the insignificant correlation between the observed variables. Though the external factors were not thoroughly investigated in the study, the factors should be taken into account to see the possible answers of the findings.

It is worth noted here that a mutual relationship between two or more variables may occur. One possible factor can be psychological factors that include students' motivation, students' interest, and even gender, whilst an external factor like environment can also contribute to the students' success in learning. Yassi et al (2018) claimed that a more significant relationship between students' intelligence and their speaking skill can be as a result of a higher motivation and a higher interest that of the students. As such, this condition may also happen in area of writing since both writing and speaking are productive skills. Also, another external factor, environment, may give a positive development on the significant relationship between the observed variables. It is a general view that a more effective environment belonging to students in learning can significantly affect the success of learning. This leads us into an assumption that social environment play significant role in determining the significant relationship between the observed variables. This is supported by Yassi's presumption (2018) that a better environment where the students are engaging speaking activities can affect the relationship between student's intelligence and speaking skills of theirs, and so can it in writing skills. Lastly, it is

highly likely that gender has a positive effect to ascertain the relationship between intelligence and productive skills. A more detailed look to Esmaeili's study (2014) reveals that in the view of the relationship between linguistic intelligence and students' writing ability, females were superior to males. This is indicated by female students' score which was higher in verbal linguistic intelligence based on the result of descriptive analysis. Meanwhile, males scored higher in other types of intelligence. At this point, it can be assumed that gender also has significant role in determining the relationship between intelligence and productive skills in general.

Other possible reasons for variances in findings among various related studies can be the MI scale used in depicting the students' MI profile and writing test and scale employed to see the students' writing performance. Inevitably, many scholars at different context employed different instruments to undergo a closely related MI-based study in the area of language learning. Some results would be in conjunction with the given theory, whilst some would be in contrast with the theory like the current study. All in all, it is evident that not only do external factors may affect the relationship between the observed variable but instruments, participants and their background of study may contribute to and influence the relationship itself.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to ascertain whether or not Multiple Intelligences as a whole or as a partial, namely linguistic intelligence, and students' writing performance in English essay writing is significantly correlated. The findings suggested that there is no significant correlation between the students' score in essay writing and MI as a whole or as partial, namely linguistic intelligence. Consequently, the findings of the present study exemplifies that Gardner's MI theory could be carefully considered as general framework in terms of examining the correlation of intelligence and language learning.

However, it is imperative that the generalization as a result from the present study should be comprehensively made as not every institution, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, applies MI-based curriculums, so the findings of the present study may contribute to those which are specifically formulated according to the principal of Multiple Intelligence theory only. In other words, there is no full guarantee for students' language learning improvement in proficiency if the teachers heavily depend on MI as the only basis in designing their plan in teaching. In contrast, the possibility to have a significant relationship between the observed variables would be established if only the teacher considered not only Multiple Intelligence theory but also other options as theoretical basis. Thus, a different result may exist and MI itself may give a significant effect on students' writing performance.

Moreover, the present study focused on finding the relationship between the observed variables only without taking any external factor as consideration. This means that the present study was not able to reveal any relationship that involves any other external factor. Therefore, some external factors of the issue like motivation, interest, environment, gender, background of knowledge, level of proficiency and so forth should be comprehensively considered in the planning stage of teaching materials or even curriculum.

Finally, even though the present study failed to find any relationship between the observed variables, the urgency of the MI theory should be bear in mind. That is why figuring out learners' MI profile gives the teachers more opportunities to predict kinds of

activities preferred by the students with either highly developed or weakly developed intelligences. For this to come true, teacher should establish in-depth understanding that students bring unique types of intelligence or students come with different combination of eight-type intelligence, and this results in some differences in learning process. It is no wonder that the teaching method applied by the teacher will determine the success of learning process as the present study exposed that solely relying on methods that only exposed students' linguistic intelligence could not generate a more satisfied achievement in learning. Also, the students' awareness of the MI profile may have obvious merits to the students themselves and even better to the teachers.

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